

Chapter 3

GREEK HISTORY

The French Academician Michel Déon has written:

"In Greece contemporary man, so often disoriented, discovers a quite incredible joy; he discovers his roots."

GREECE - HELLAS

The roots of much of the Western world lie in the civilizations of the ancient Greece and Rome. This chapter is intended to bring you small pieces of those rich roots of our Greek past. The objectives of this chapter are: first, to enrich our consciousness with those bits of information and to build an awareness of what it means to be connected with the Greek past; and second, to relate those parts of Greek history that affected the migrations of the Greeks during the last few centuries. Knowledge of migration patterns may prove to be very valuable in your search for your ancestors.



Paintings of Knossos (about 1200 B.C.)

The name "**Hellas**" was first used by Homer. In historical times the name "**Hellenes**"

[Greeks] denoted the inhabitants of 700 or more city-states in the Greek peninsula including Epirus, Macedonia, Thrace, Asia Minor, and many of the shores of the Mediterranean and the Black Seas.

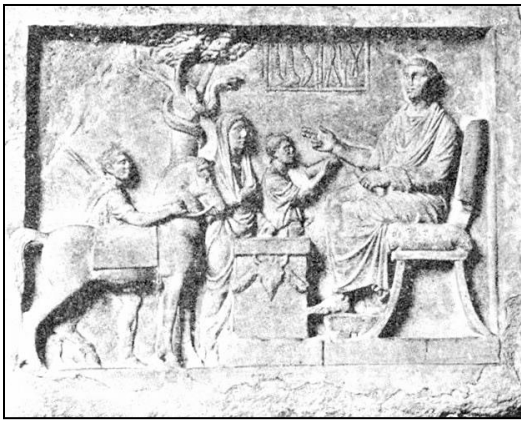
Life in Greece first appeared on the Halkidiki Peninsula dated to the Middle Paleolithic era (50.000 B.C). Highly developed civilizations appeared from about 3000 to 2000 B.C. During the Neolithic period, important cultural centers developed, especially in Thessaly, Crete, Attica, Central Greece and the Peloponnesus.

The famous **Minoan** advanced prehistoric culture of 2800-1100 B.C. appeared in Crete. We see more artistic development in the Bronze Age (2000 BC), during which Crete was the center of a splendid civilization. It was a mighty naval power, wealthy and powerful. Ruins of great palaces with beautiful paintings were found in **Knossos**, Phaistos, and Mallia.

Soon after the Minoan we see the marvelous **Mycenaean** civilization in the Peloponnesus, rich in gold, with impressive palaces, great fortifications, and works of art, many of which have survived until today.



Female bust (5th century B.C.)



Ancient Greek physician receiving patients

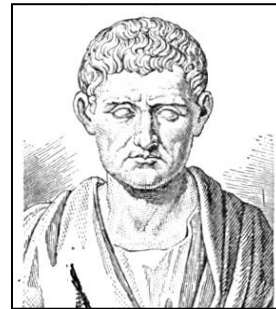
The costly **Trojan War** (about 1100 B.C.) led to the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization.

During the next several hundred years the Greek *polis* or **city-state** evolved. Athens, Sparta, Thebes, Argos, and Corinth were the principal city-states. Eventually two city-states emerged to dominate Greece – the city of Athens, a democracy and a sea power, and the city of Sparta, a militaristic society, and a land power. In the fifth century B.C., a **Persian invasion** united the cities briefly, mainly under the military leadership of Athens. The united Greek cities won a brilliant victory over the Persian invaders (490-479 BC).



Hippocrates (469-399 B.C.) He was considered the father of medicine

The 5th and 4th centuries BC constitute the **Golden Age**, the Classical Miracle, which was an explosion of cultural and intellectual achievements that formed the basis of Western civilization. Rightfully, Greece is considered to be "The Crucible of Civilization." The influence of **Athens** radiated everywhere, for here flourished letters, arts, theater and philosophy. Political institutions were formed, culminating in the triumph of **Democracy!** The increasing political power of Athens and its rivalry with Corinth and Sparta was one of the several causes of the catastrophic **Peloponnesian War** (431-404 BC) which struck a mortal blow to the development of the cities.



The great philosopher Aristotle, 384-322 B.C., pupil of Plato, and teacher of Alexander the Great

The sad side of ancient Greek history was the persistent disunity that resulted in continuous wars among the main Greek city-states, Athens, Sparta, Corinth and Thebes. King Philip II of Macedonia (359-336 BC) and his son **Alexander the Great** (336-323 BC) were the ones who succeeded in persuading the majority of the Greek cities to unite and form a Pan-Hellenic state and army which, under the leadership of Alexander the Great, spread the Hellenic civilization to the East, and established new cities like Alexandria of Egypt. The philosopher Isocrates is considered the one who influenced King Philip in this direction. Alexander the Great materialized the dreams and plans of his father.

Alexander the Great was able to defeat the Persian Empire, to march through near and

Middle Eastern countries and reach as far as Punjab in northern India. During his life and following his death at age 32, education and development of the arts were the most important achievements of the citizens, thus creating what is known as the **Hellenistic** period. After Alexander's death, his vast empire passed to his successors, who divided it into states.

In Greece proper there was an alliance of confederations (Aetolian-Achaian) which did not succeed in uniting the cities. As a result **Imperial Rome** conquered the Hellenistic world (146 BC). Paradoxically, the victorious Romans accepted the values of the Hellenistic civilization!



The Parthenon on the Acropolis hill, Athens
(built in the 5th century B.C.)

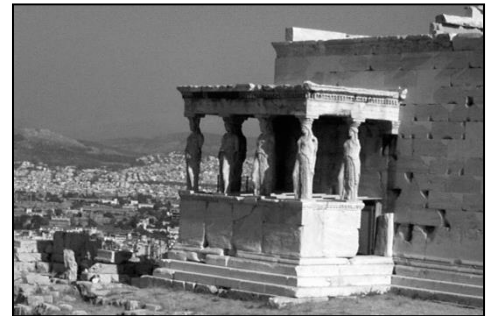
From AD 395 Greece constituted part of the **Byzantine Empire** and many cities such as Patras and Corinth, in North Peloponnese, reached their acme. Others, like Mystras (1348-1460), near Sparta, became intellectual centers, and others like Monemvasia in South Peloponnese, and Nauplion in East Peloponnese, became commercial centers. During this period barbaric invasions and piratical attacks were a constant plague throughout the land. With the Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople by the Franks (1204), Greece was divided into **Frankish** and **Venetian** states, while a few areas such as Epirus remained in Byzantine hands. Constantinople, that great city famous in world history was built by **Constantine the**

Great in 330 AD in the place where the Ancient Byzantium (an Athenian colony at Bosphorus) used to stand. Constantinople was the capital of the Byzantine Empire 330-1453, and after conquest by the Turks it became the capital of the Ottoman Empire 1453-1923. In the 1920's it was named Istanbul by the Turks.



The Erechtheion on the Acropolis hill, Athens,
(built 521-407 B.C.)

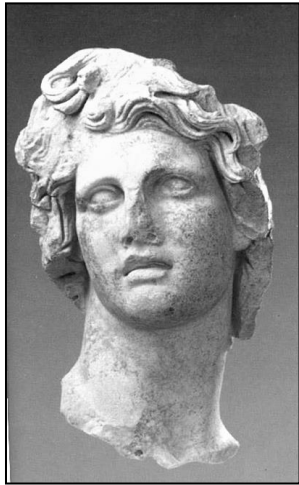
When the Byzantine Empire was completely **defeated by the Turks** (15th century AD) a **large migration** occurred. During this time Greeks were spread all over the then-known world (Greek Diaspora). While living in other countries, most of them did not lose their Greek identity. They always hoped, and sometimes attempted to free their country from **Turkish rule**.



The Karyatides, south view of Erechtheyon

One of those attempts took place in the area of Mani (South Peloponnese) with devastating results for the residents. The attempt was supported by Alexis and Theodore Grigorievitch, members of the Russian aristocratic family **Orlof**, who brought their fleet to Greece (1770 AD), freed the cities Kalama, Mystras, and Kyparissia and burned the Turkish fleet. Eventually they left the Greeks, who were fighting for their

independence, to the fierce anger of the Turks who retaliated by performing terrible massacres. As a result, many Greeks and their families fled to the nearby island Cythera [Kythira] which is located at the South of Peloponnesus, and is administratively part of the Ionian Islands.



Head of Helios (2nd century B.C.)

Other **Ionian Islands**, which are also called “Eptanisa” (meaning seven islands), namely: Corfu [Kerkyra], Kephallonia [Kefallinia], Leukada [Leukas], Ithaca [Ithaki], Zante [Zakynthos], Paxoi and Antipaxoi, and Kythira) served as refuge for many Greeks during the centuries that Greece was ruled by the Ottoman Empire (Turks). These islands were under **Venetian rule**, later under **Frankish rule**, and finally under **English rule** until 1864 when they were ceded to Greece by Great Britain.

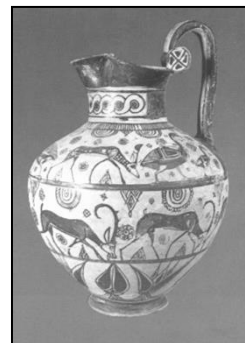
Not only the islands but also parts of the west coast of Greece were under Venetian or under Frankish rule. According to the *Passarovitz treaty* of 1718 the cities *Preveza*, *Patrai*, *Vonitsa*, and the lake *Vouthrotos*, with their surrounding villages were under Venetian rule. On 17 October 1797, the Ionian Islands were **ceded to France** and were divided in 3 counties:

The *Corfu County* including the islands Corfu [Kerkyra], Paxoi and Antipaxoi, Othonoi, the lake Vouthrotos, the town Parga, with their surrounding villages.

The *Ithaca County* including the islands Ithaca [Ithaki], Leukas, Kefallinia, the cities Preveza, and Vonitsa, with their surrounding villages.

The *Aegean Sea County* [Aigaiou Pelagous] including the islands Zante [Zakynthos], Strofades, Kythira, and the town Dragamesto (today named Karaiskakis [Καραϊσκάκης]) with their surrounding villages.

More attempts for freedom took place on the mainland as well as the islands during the centuries. Remarkable is the heroism of the Greeks of the mainland as well as of the islands during the struggle for freedom. An example is the **Souliotes** (the residents of Souli of Epirus) who fought for and managed to maintain their independence through hundreds of years until the 19th century. On 28 July 1822, Souli was delivered to the Turks and the *Souliotes* who survived fled with their families to the Ionian Islands.



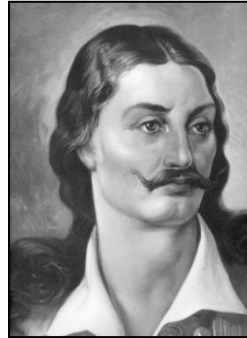
Oinochoe [wine vessel]
(7th century B.C.)

The **Orthodox Church** played a very significant role during foreign rule by keeping alive the ethnic consciousness among the Greeks, and by teaching the Greek language (reading and writing) to the children through their network of secret schools called Κρυφό Σχολειό [Kryfo Sholeio], schools that functioned at night. The responsibilities of the clergy were not only religious but also judicial, which provided the Greek people the opportunity of enjoying some autonomy, at least in some areas of the land.

The **War of Independence** [Epanastasis] officially started on 25 March 1821. The Greeks were fighting against the Turks. The Turks often were assisted by Albanian troops, and Egyptian fleets.



Kitsos Tzavellas



Athanasios Diakos

Some of the **heroic leaders** of the war of Independence are: Rigas Feraios (1757-1798) forerunner of the Independence war, Odysseas Androutsos (1790-1825), Palaion Patron Germanos (1771-1826), Athanasios Diakos, Konstantinos Kanaris (1790-1877), Georgios Karaiskakis (1780-1827), Lampros Katsonis (1752-1804), Theodoros Kolokotronis (1770-1843), Andreas Miaoulis (1769-1835), Alexandros Maurokordatos (1791-1865), Petros Mauromihalis – Petrompeis (1765-1848), Markos Mpotsaris (1790-1823), Lampros Tzavelas, his sons Fotos Tzavelas, and Kitsos Tzavelas, Nikitaras or Nikitas Stamatelopoulos (1781-1849), Papaflessas or Grigorios Dikaïos or Flessas (1788-1825), and many more heroes and heroines who fearlessly fought for freedom.

Some of the most prominent heroic women with leadership positions during the Independence war were: Mosho Tzavela who, after her husband Lambros died in battle, took over the leadership of the troops, and lead them in victorious battles. Another heroine is Laskarina Mpoupoulina (1771-1825), who also, after her husband was killed (1811), took over the leadership of the small fleet of her husband, and led it in victorious battles. Manto Maurogenous (died in 1848) was another heroine who officially became a lieutenant-general.

After a heroic struggle, independence was finally achieved in 1829, and the **Greek nation was established** (1830). Under European guidance a monarchy was established in 1832 with a Bavarian young prince named Otto [Οθων] as a king, with three viceroys ruling until Otto reached adulthood. Today the 25th of March is a very important Greek national holiday, celebrated not only in Greece but in every part of the world where Greek communities exist.

Until 1864 **Greece included**: Central Greece [Sterea Ellas] – also called *Roumeli* – with the island Euvoia, the Cyclades [Kyklades] and Sporades islands of the Aegean Sea, and the Peloponnese [Peloponnisos] – also called *Morias* – (see map on p.52.). The capital of the new born nation was Nauplion. In 1834 the viceroys decided to relocate the capital of Greece to the city of Athens [Athinai].



Manto Maurogenous



**Laskarina
Mpoupoulina**

The period of king Otto's reign is called Οθωνική Περίοδος [**Ottonic Period**]. During that period many leadership positions in the Greek army and the Greek government were held by Bavarian men who were not familiar with the Greek language, therefore many military records were written both in Greek and German, and some records were even written only in the **German language**.

The Greek people objected to the absolute monarchy of Otto's reign and eventually a revolution took place on 3 September 1843, which lead to the birth of the Constitution (1844).



Costumes of the 19th century

In 1862 king Otto was dethroned and replaced by a Danish prince who became king George I of Greece (1863). The second Constitution was established in 1864.

Since 1832, the **boundaries** of Greece have enlarged as follows: In 1864, the Ionian Islands were ceded to Greece by Great Britain. In 1881, Thessaly and part of Epirus were ceded to Greece by Turkey. In 1913, Macedonia and the Aegean Islands were ceded to Greece by Turkey together with Crete which was under Turkish rule since 1669. In 1918, Western Thrace was ceded to Greece by Bulgaria. In 1920, Eastern Thrace, Smyrna, and other towns of Asia Minor were granted to Greece; however in 1923, these areas were returned to Turkey. In 1947 the Dodecanese Islands were ceded to Greece by Italy. (See map, p.52.)

We may want to mention here that the island of Cyprus which was under Turkish rule was given to England in the year 1878. In the middle of the 20th century Cyprus became an independent nation.

During the years of Ottoman Rule up to the middle of the 19th century the residents

suffered attacks not only by the Turks but also by pirates sailing in the Mediterranean Sea, and land robbers. In order to avoid these attacks the residents built their villages high on the mountains in remote unreachable areas, usually far from the fields they cultivated. At the end of the 19th century they started building new villages on lower elevations near their fields and olive orchards. This is why we see many **ghost towns**.

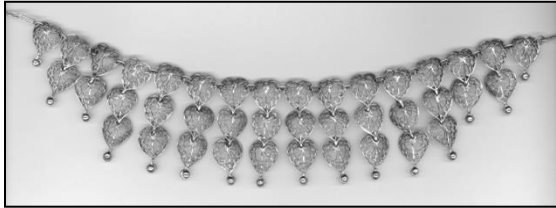


Costumes worn in Epirus until the 19th century

Some examples of this phenomenon are: the towns of *Vrahnaiika*, which is in nomos [county] *Ahaias*, and *Vrahnaiika*, which is in nomos *Ileias*. These villages were built by the residents of *Vrahni* (in nomos *Kalavryton*) who decided to have their homes in fertile areas, since there was no more danger of attacks. Another example is the town *Ahilleion*, *Magnisias*, which was built by the residents of the village *Hamako*, which became a ghost town. It is interesting from a family history research point of view that the records of the ghost town *Vrahni* are found in the town *Kalavryta*. The records of *Hamako* are found in the town *Ahilleion*.

Due to the many wars and invasions during the ages, Greeks developed the habit of investing in jewelry which we often see decorating their beautiful costumes.

Some costumes have golden coins sewed on the front of the dresses and the head covers. The idea was that in case they had to run for their lives, they had some valuables with them.



Silver necklace, typical art of Ioannina

During the middle and end of the 19th century, and even during the first and second decade of the 20th century Greece was faced with great financial problems, as a result of the many wars she was engaged in. Many citizens left their homeland in an attempt to live a better life. For more information about Greek migration see chapter 5, p.67.



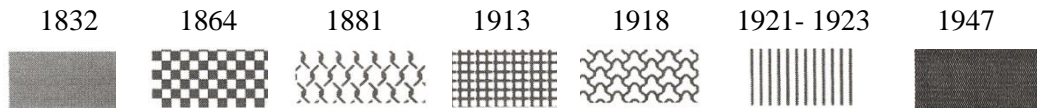
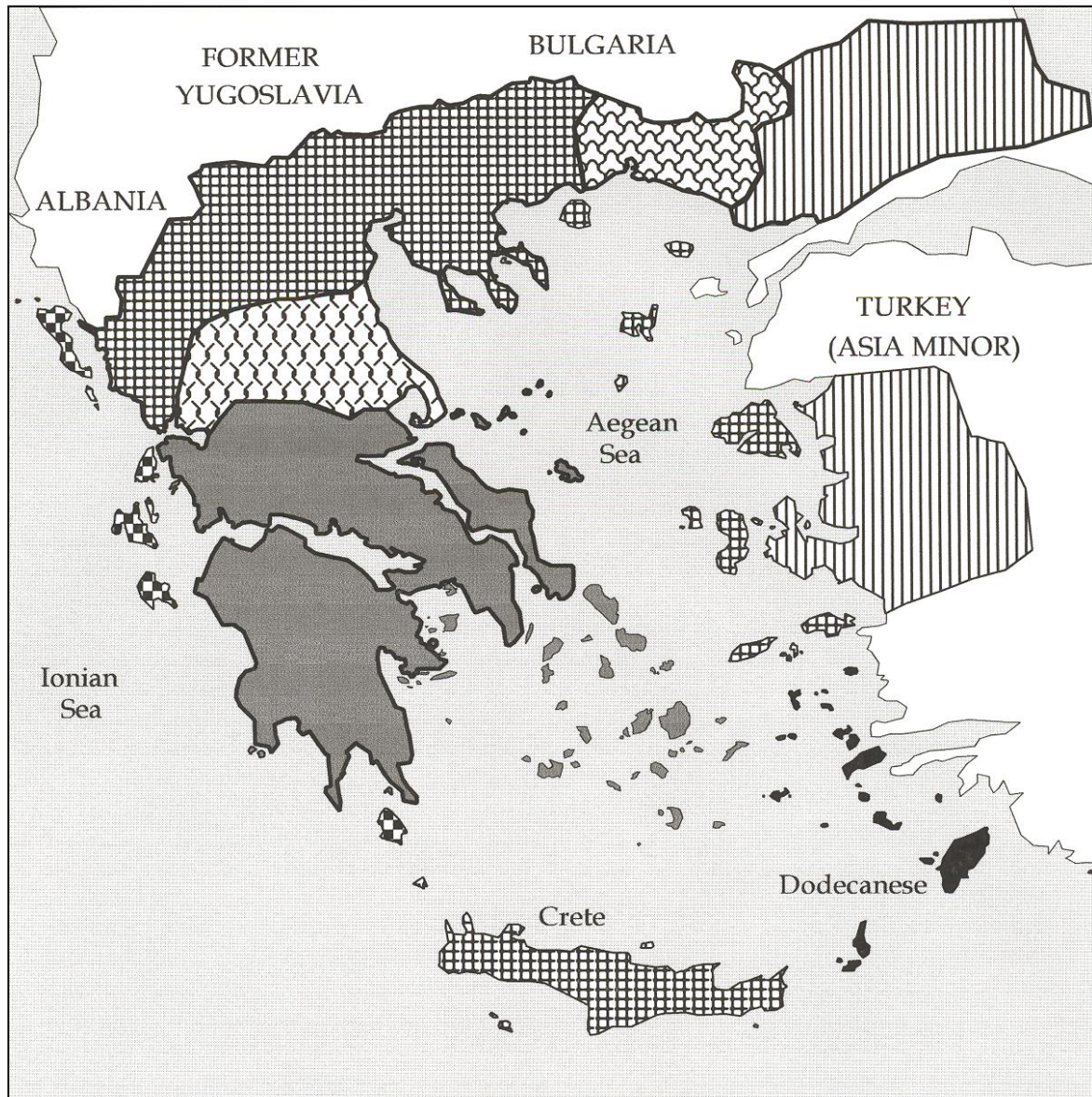
Costumes worn in Attica until the 19th century

The next page has a map of Greece showing the various areas that were added to Greece through the 19th and 20th centuries A.D.



Mosaic floor in Delos

HISTORY MAP OF GREECE



1832 – The original Greek Kingdom

1864 – The Ionian Islands ceded to Greece by Great Britain

1881 – Thessaly and part of Epirus ceded to Greece by Turkey

1913 – Crete, Macedonia and the Aegean Islands ceded to Greece by Turkey

1918 – Western Thrace ceded to Greece by Bulgaria

1920 – Eastern Thrace and part of Asia Minor granted to Greece

1923 – Eastern Thrace and part of Asia Minor returned to Turkey after the Greek-Turkish war

1947 – The Dodecanese Islands ceded to Greece by Italy



Greek officers of World War I

In 1917, Greece entered **World War I** on the side of the Allies and took part in the Allied occupation of Turkey where many Greeks still lived. In 1922, the Greek army tried to expand from its base in Smyrna [Izmir] toward Ankara but was forced to withdraw.



Greek soldiers of World War I

As a result, more than 1.3 million Greek **refugees** from Turkey (Asia Minor Eastern Thrace, and Pontus) poured into Greece. For more information about these refugees see chapter 5, p.68.

During **World War II** Greece was again on the side of the Allies. On October 28, 1940, Mussolini requested from the Greek government to bring the Italian troops into Greece in order to enhance his war effort in Egypt. The answer was 'OXI' [NO pronounced ohi]; therefore Mussolini attacked

Greece at the Greek-Albanian borders. The Greeks fought heroically, all united as one. The Greek army was victorious and gained a large part of Albania. However Hitler attacked Greece from the Greek-Yugoslavian borders, and by the end of May 1941, the Germans had overrun most of the country. However, Greek resistance had cost Germany precious weeks in its schedule for the invasion of the Soviet Union. Many of the Greeks involved in the Greek resistance lost their lives in Germany's concentration camps.



Greek officer of World War II

Greece was liberated from the **German occupation** in 1944. After the war, **Communist** attempts to take over Greece led to civil war. The civil war ended in 1949. Then, in the 1950s Greece experienced a period of political stability and economic growth. The internal conflicts again arose in the 1960s and in 1967 a military **junta** took control of the government and king Constantine was expelled from the country. Greece was declared a republic in 1973 and democracy was re-established.

On 1 January 1981 Greece became the tenth member of the **European Community**.

The official name of Greece is the **Hellenic Republic** Ελληνική Δημοκρατία [Elliniki Dimokratia].

